

Crucifixion

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Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0 : 00] Well, good evening everyone and welcome to our Good Friday service. My name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the Assistant Pastor at Brunsfield Evangelical Church and the privilege of opening up God's Word to us this evening on a very special evening that is Good Friday when we gather to remember the Lord Jesus and His death.

Let us bow our heads in prayer as we come to God's Word. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the privilege we have of gathering and thinking, reflecting on and appreciating the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, would the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts this evening be pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer, in whose precious name we pray. Amen.

I wonder how many of you would wear one of these. It is a cross necklace and it is seen by many as a great fashion statement, a fashion accessory that can make your outfit have that little bit more dazzle to it when it's put on.

Thousands of people walk around with it hanging from their necks. People have it tattooed on their bodies. People wear it on their clothes. But have you ever considered what it actually means?

[1 : 27] The cross was a brutal instrument of torture and execution, used for years but made most brutal by the Romans.

The person was whipped, causing deep wounds in their back and their legs. And then they were forced to carry the very cross beam that they were nailed to and hoisted in the air.

With their hands and their feet nailed to the wood, a person would basically suffocate because they couldn't lift themselves up to breathe. It was an agonizing death that was deemed most brutal and shameful death in Rome.

So much so that Roman citizens were not allowed to be crucified. Crucifixion was the favorite way of Rome to kill people and in the whole of the first century.

And there is no way of knowing how many crucifixions took place, but there are multiple accounts of mass crucifixions. So the numbers are estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

[2 : 43] But how has this instrument of torture and execution become a symbol that we wear around our necks? Well, maybe as a Christian, you're wearing it as a sign of your faith and hope in Jesus who was crucified in Jerusalem.

But do we really consider the meaning of the cross that we wear so lightly? This evening, I'd like us to think about the death of Jesus on the cross.

But we're going to look at it from a slightly different perspective. The perspective of the Roman centurion from Mark chapter 15. We meet this Roman centurion who has been given responsibility of overseeing the death of Jesus and two criminals.

Now, this man was probably a battle-hardened soldier. He'd probably seen plenty of death during his lifetime on the battlefield and in riots in the tumultuous city that Jerusalem had become.

And he'd probably overseen thousands of crucifixions and seen countless men and women lose their life nailed to a cross. He might have become numb to the sight of the cross because some victims would hang there for three days at a time.

[4 : 11] But yet we will see this evening that the crucifixion of this one man changed the centurion's life. There was something so different about how Jesus died that the Roman centurion couldn't help but declare in Mark chapter 15 verse 39, Surely this man is the Son of God.

Now, why does he make this life changing confession? What is so different about Jesus that suddenly the centurion goes from killing to confessing Jesus as the Son of God?

Well, with that question in the back of your minds, turn with me to Mark chapter 15 and I'll read from verse 16 to verses 39. And keep the centurion in the back of your mind and ask yourself, why is this crucifixion different?

So let's read together Mark 15 verse 16. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace, that is the praetorium, and called together the whole company of soldiers.

They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call to him, Hail, King of the Jews!

[5 : 37] Again and again they struck him on his head with a staff and spat on him. And falling on their knees, they paid homage to him.

And when they'd mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put on his own clothes, and they led him out to be crucified. A certain man of Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

The written notice of the charge against him read, The King of the Jews. They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.

[6 : 51] Those who passed by hurled insults at him and shaking their heads, saying, So you who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself.

And in the same way, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him. Among themselves, he saved others, they said.

But he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe. Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

And at noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lemach sabachthani.

Which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And when some of those standing near heard this, they said, Listen, he's calling Elijah.

[7 : 54] Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink. Now leave him alone.

Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down, he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was the Son of God.

If you were with us on Sunday morning, we were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We were thinking about how in that moment, as Jesus knew that just hours later he would be crucified, and bearing the full wrath of God against the sins of the world, it was in that moment of pain that Jesus uttered the most powerful words of obedience and submission.

And he said, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

[9 : 10] And so from there, let's travel through what the Thursday evening and early Friday looked like in the life of Jesus. And we will see how this crucifixion brought about a life-changing confession in our Roman centurion and how it should make us consider how we view the cross and how we view Jesus today.

So after Jesus prays in the garden, what follows is a dreadful, dreadful night of unjust and improper trial. Jesus is dragged before a botched courtroom of religious elite in Jerusalem, who gathered in the night illegally to act as judge, jury and executioner.

They decided that they wanted Jesus dead before he even stood before them. So the question wasn't, is he innocent or is he guilty? But the question was, how can we kill him?

So they bring false witnesses against him. People with made up stories who testify against him. Lies upon lies to cover the truth that everybody knows, but no one wants to speak.

That Jesus is innocent. He has done no wrong. And so here we see the first thing that is different about the death of Jesus. That he was innocent.

[10 : 42] Standing before this botched courtroom filled with religious leaders, who should have been eagerly expecting and anticipating his return. The arrival of the Messiah, the sent one from God.

This was the very group that should have welcomed him with open arms. And with ears ready to hear his message. But they do not welcome him with a warm handshake.

But they blindfold him. They spit at him. They mock him. They mock him. And they beat him. This is absolutely shocking.

The people that Jesus came to save. The people that he has been healing and teaching about God for the last three years. Turn on him.

And in chapter 15, verse 13, they stand before a Roman ruler who holds the authority to release or kill Jesus. And the crowd shouts, crucify him with anger and hatred on their voices.

[11 : 54] The crowd that just a few days earlier had rejoiced and heralded Jesus as king on his arrival to Jerusalem. The crowd that lay down their coats on the street so that Jesus could walk over and shouted praise and adoration.

They've now turned against him and are shouting for his blood. Shouting for his death. And not only that, but the most brutal death known to man.

Now, Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent and has done no wrong. Yet, for fear of the crowd, he orders Jesus to be executed by crucifixion.

A punishment that he'd probably commanded thousands of times. But this time it was different. Because Jesus was innocent. So after botched trials, crowd manipulation and false witnesses, Jesus is handed over to soldiers to prepare him for crucifixion.

In verse 16. And the whole barracks gather to see this figure who once stood teaching people about God. Now, beaten, bloodied, broken, wounded.

[13 : 16] They mock Jesus. They put a purple robe on him, a sign of royalty and twist, a crown of thorns and push it on his head. And after being whipped, mocked, beaten and stripped of his clothes and humiliated, they take him to Golgotha.

A place just outside the city where crucifixions happened so that everyone could see the shame and immense pain that these people felt.

And as Jesus was nailed to the cross and hoisted in the air, passers-by sneered at him and mocked him.

Some told him to save himself and be done with the pain if he really was the Messiah, the sent one of God. Though he is innocent, Jesus is suffering immense pain.

But little did the people know that all of this was part of God's plan. Jesus needed to go through the mockery, the misery and the marring of his flesh before he could once again rejoice in his rightful place of majesty.

[14 : 39] Friends, this was God's plan because on the cross, Jesus bears the weight of your sin. He bears the weight of my sin.

And as Jesus hung there on the cross, he was the spotless lamb. He was the sacrifice that would take away the sins of us, guilty, vile, helpless sinners.

That is why the cross and crucifixion of Jesus should be the moment that changes every single life in the world.

Because innocent Jesus died for guilty sinners so that we can be made clean, can be made right with God.

That is why the cross is both the most beautiful and most horrific moment in history. It's horrific because Jesus, the only perfect and sinless person to have ever lived, God in the flesh, is nailed to a wooden cross and executed.

[15 : 51] But it's beautiful because Jesus willingly went there, knowing that his death would bring life to millions of people across the world.

That is why the old hymn writer Isaac Watts could write in his hymn, When I surveyed the wondrous cross, See from his head, his hands, his feet, Sorrow and love flowed mingled down.

Did ever such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown? Sorrow, because the innocent one is dying in the place of the guilty.

The spotless, sinless lamb is dying for a sinful humanity. And love, because friends, that suffering, that agony, that punishment is yours and mine.

We deserve to be on that cross. But out of amazing love, Jesus took our place. It was our sin that held him there.

[17 : 04] And he willingly bore that punishment for us. No greater love has the world ever known than the Son of God dying for us sinners.

That is true sacrificial love, embodied by the sacrificial death of Jesus. So was this different for the centurion?

Was this a different crucifixion compared to all the others he'd supervised? Well, of course it was. This man was innocent, and yet he was dying for the guilty.

And the second reason why this crucifixion is different is because of the darkness. So standing in amazement, the centurion sees this bleak darkness fall over the land at midday.

For three hours they stood in darkness. A sign of God's wrath and judgment against the sins of the world. And all the while, Jesus is in physical agony.

[18 : 11] But worse than that, he is in spiritual agony, as the full weight of God's wrath against sin is laid on him. Jesus is bearing all the just wrath of a holy God against the sins of an unholy people.

And in his agony, Jesus cries out in verse 34, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It's as if God has forgotten him.

The punishment is so severe. Behold the man upon a cross. My sin upon his shoulders. Ashamed I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished. The cross should make us see the seriousness of sin.

Because the punishment was so severe and yet it was right. It was required. Jesus went through darkness and pain. Destruction and death.

[19 : 26] That each of us deserves. For how we have wronged and rejected God. And yet after this period of darkness, in John's gospel, we're told that Jesus' final words were not that of defeat.

They were of a completed task. Jesus cried out, It is finished. And he died. It is finished.

The centurion saw those words come out of Jesus' mouth. But what could they mean? Well, they mean that the wrath of God against the sins of his people is satisfied.

They mean that the judgment and wrath that we rightfully deserve has been laid on Jesus and it is done. God's righteous wrath has been taken.

Friends, it is finished. Sin, judgment and wrath was laid on Jesus and now in its place we have been given hope, peace with God and life, life now and life eternal.

[20 : 43] No more punishment is required for those who follow Jesus. We are free. It is finished, Jesus said. And then the third difference in the crucifixion of Jesus is that the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

The curtain of the temple which separated the holy of holies, the physical reminder of how a holy God cannot dwell with an unholy people, has been torn from top to bottom.

Friends, the wonderful news of the cross is that Jesus made it possible for sinners like you and like me to be able to go directly to God and call him father.

That is an immense privilege. Jesus died so that we can be saved. So that we can be taken from living in darkness and separation from God.

To living in light and being called sons and daughters of the living God. That is wonderful news.

[21 : 57] And that is the meaning of the cross. We now have direct access to God who is our heavenly father. And so the centurion is watching all of this and he cannot help but say in verse 39, surely, surely this man was the son of God.

Now maybe at that moment, he remembered all the things that he'd done in his life. All the people that he'd killed.

All the atrocities that he'd done in the name of Rome. And maybe how even just a few hours earlier, standing with his soldiers, they beat the very man he now declares as the son of God.

Can you imagine the weight of that shame? The weight of that sin? We should all feel that same disgust.

That same hatred of sin, of our sin. Because it required the death of Jesus. But friends, the wonderful news is that that is precisely why Jesus died.

[23 : 08] His death declares people forgiven. He bore our sin and he has gifted us his perfect righteousness, his status of being right with God.

He died so that sin has no more say over us. He died defeating death itself and bearing our shame so that we need not feel it any more.

So as we look to the cross, we should see an instrument of execution and torture. But more importantly, we should see what the centurion seemed to grasp to an extent that he saw the cross as a place of victory.

The cross is a symbol of hope, of peace with God and the very means through which people are offered life. Another New Testament letter puts it this way.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the Lord.

[24 : 22] But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful Saviour we have.

We cannot simply overlook the cross as a nice story. But it must be the historical event that causes our hearts and our voices to sing in endless praise of the wonderful Saviour who died so that we can live.

The wonderful Saviour who died so that we can have access to God. And the wonderful Saviour who died so that those who put their trust in Him need not fear punishment.

But are instead filled with a certain hope and future promise of a glorious dwelling with God in eternity forever.

The cross of Jesus Christ should lead us to marvel in the unending love of God and stand amazed at His grace that He shows by dying in our place.

[25 : 36] The death of Jesus is the moment that secured life for those who trust in Him. His death was no defeat but His death was victorious because He dealt the final blow to sin and death itself.

So whilst we see that the cross is a brutal death that we look at rightly with horror and shock for the Christian we look at the cross with hope and with rejoicing because it was there that our salvation was secured.

And as a proof of that wonderful news that millions of people hold to Jesus did not remain in the grave but He would rise again as we will celebrate on Easter Sunday.

Therefore rejoice because the cross was not the end. Our Savior lives and He offers you life. The death of Jesus brought about a wonderful confession in the centurion and I imagine from that moment on that His life would never be the same.

Friends, the death of Jesus should bring about a moment of change in our lives because it is the ultimate picture of the love of God for a sinful world.

[27 : 08] That God Himself would step into our mess into our sinful world and die in our place so that we can be forgiven. There is no greater love than that.

But the cross leaves us with a decision. If we follow Jesus we are promised life both now and for eternity in the place we call heaven.

But those who reject Jesus will spend eternity in separation from God bearing the weight of His wrath against sin in the place we call hell.

For the Christian, Jesus took that punishment but for those who reject Jesus they must bear that punishment themselves. Friends, as we draw to a close how do you see the cross?

Is it a historical means of torture and of death or is it a symbol of life of hope and of love?

[28 : 17] If you are a Christian rejoice because your Savior took your place God's plan of salvation was fulfilled and abound in endless praise because you are now a son or daughter of the living God we serve a wonderful Savior.

And if you are not a Christian think about why the death of Jesus was different from all the other crucifixions our centurion had supervised.

Why did he come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God? I'd encourage you this evening I'd encourage you now to consider where you stand before God because Jesus made it possible for you to be right with Him to be forgiven of your sin and your shame.

This is not a decision to be taken lightly and it is not a decision to postpone for a more convenient time but now is the time to listen to the voice of Jesus calling you to repent and believe the good news.

Friends, Jesus died so that we can have life and He offers it to you now. Will you follow Him? Let's pray together.

[29 : 53] Heavenly Father we thank You so much for what we celebrate at Easter. Jesus, we thank You so much that You were willing to die in our place that You were willing to go to a cross and die the death that we deserve and You gave us Your righteousness.

You've now made it possible for us to be right with God. What a privilege to be taken from darkness to light. Jesus, thank You. Father, would You help us reflect on where we stand before You this evening and would You help us continue to reflect until Easter Sunday where we rejoice because our Saviour lives and it is in His holy and precious name that we pray.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.